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VIRGINIA LEGISLATIVE PAPERS.

FROM THE ORIGINALS IN THE VIRGINIA STATE ARCHIVES.

CONTINUED.

**PETITION OF DISSENTERS OF ALBEMARLE, AMHERST AND
BUCKINGHAM, OCT. 22D, 1776.**

To the honourable, the Delegates & Representatives, of the several Counties & Corporations of Virginia in Convention assembled in the City of Williamsburg.

The Memorial & Declaration of the Disenters from the Church of England in the Counties of Albemarle, Amhurst & Buckingham, Virginia, humbly sheweth,

That your Memorialists have never been on an equal footing with the other good people of this colony in Respect of Religious Privileges, having been obliged by law, to contribute to ye support of ye Established Church, while at the same time, they were moved from a Principal of Conscience To support that Church of which they called themselves members. Yet in as much as this was the form of Government established, either when they came into ye Colony, or being natives thereof, when they became dissenters from ye Church of England, for ye sake of good order, they have Patiently submitted to their Grievance, continuing to be Peaceable & loyal subjects, always ready & willing to stand up with the foremost in the support of Government & in defence of the just Right & Property of ye subjects.

That when it became necessary that the form of Government should be new moddled, in consequence of our having thrown off our dependance on the Crown & Parliament of Great Britain, your Memorialists flattered themselves that, that form of Government, which would secure just & equal Right to the subject, would be ye choice of every Individual, both from the Consideration of ye Justice & good Policy that

would be continued in it, & also from the consideration, that by the joint & strenuous endeavours of every one our liberty, our all must be defended against ye unjust violators thereof, and that all thereupon should enjoy equal privilege.—

But observing that there are many, who are violent for a re-establishment of the Episcopal Church & having been informed that to this end there are Sundry Petitions about to be Presented to the house at the next session, signed by the bulk of the People, your memorialists Judge it to be their Indispensable Duty, as they would not Friendly submit to the oppression of former laws, now extinct themselves, and as they would not give their assis't to its being intailed on posterity to be as early as they can in Declaring their Disapprobation of any form of Government, so extremely partial and absurd—

Your Memorialists Judge it so extremely hard that any one Religious Denomination of people, of the same corrupt nature, worshipping the same God, & struggling in the same common cause, should be established is by law, in preference to all others; & that allowed every other religious section, should be obliged to contribute to the support of that Church thus established, while at the same time, it is with great difficulty that they can support the Publick worship of God in that way and manner, that they Rather choose; that they solemnly declare that the same motive, namely liberty, that exerted them to venture life & fortune in opposing the measures adopted by the King of Parliament of Great Britain, will still Determine them to bleed at every vein before they submit to any form of Government that may be subversive of these Religious Privileges that are a natural Right, and that stand nearer every man of Principal, than even life itself. And while your Memorialists Declare this to be their Resolution in Particular, they believe it to be ye Resolution of many thousands in this Colony, whether they have thought of the Propriety of declaring it or not.

Your Memorialists Desire nothing more, with regard to Religious Matters, than that every Religious Denominations

may stand on an equal footing, be supported by themselves, Independent of each other. This mode of Government, your Memorialists conceive, not only to be just & Reasonable in itself; but to be such as most certainly would have an happy Influence on the greater purity of the several churches; on their more free, and friendly Intercourse with one another and an attaching warmly a making all of every denomination to Government. This would give ample satisfaction. This granted, your Memorialists shall ever wish well to the Common Wealth, and shall always do every thing in their Power to defend it, and to Rear it up in its growing greatness, to that high of Glory to which we one day hope to see it arrive.. Your Memorialists, therefore, pray this honourable house to take this their Memorialists & Declaration under this Consideration & Grant them their most Reasonable Request, and your Memorialists shall ever Pray.—

John McClones	Jas. Shields
Tho's Morison	Tho's McClean
Simon Ramsy	Jas. Fitchgerrel
Francis Turner	Thomas Ewers
Francis Montgomery	Owen Herndon
James Bell	John Puckett
Cha's Massie	Alex'r Miller
Thos. Stevenson	Thomas Gratt
W'm Crow	Ben. Bryant
Joseph Roberts	John Lancaster
Samuel Bell	Jacob Puckett
David Simson	Jeremiah Callahue
Edwert Monslgy	Robert Dinwiddie
Ralph Willson	Jas. Dinwiddie Sen'r
Ja's Willson	James Dinwiddie Jun'r
William Henderson	John Sale
James Brooks	John Aikisson
Tho's Carpenter Sen?	John Barnett
John Carpenter	Peter Carter
Allen Simpson	Drury Tucker Jun'r

William Clark	Lindsey Coleman
Michael McNeely	Drury Tucker
Samuel Dinwiddie	W'm Johns
Sam'l Miller	John Penn
Ben. Carpenter	Jesse Mills
Thos. Carpenter	John Christian Buflon
John Hardie	Thomas Ballen
David Clarke	David Woodroof
John Bording	Thomas Matthews
John Dinwiddie	Benjamin Noel
Thos. Kallan	William Hill
Alex'ar Henderson	Christian Henderson
John Shields	John Scott
W'm Barnett	Charles Reynolds
Charles Brooke	

[Endorsement]

1776. Oct. 22.

Ref'd to Com. of Religion

METHODIST PETITION, OCT. 28, 1776.*

Ref'd to Com. of Religion

To The General Convention of Virginia Assembled at Williamsburg the 7th day of October 1776—the petition of the People Commonly called Methodists humbly sheweth—
That your petitioners being informed the dissenters are pre-

* Though Methodism in Virginia, as an organization, did not begin until shortly before the Revolution, one of its great founders was here long before. The *Virginia Gazette*, under date Williamsburg, December 21, 1739, has the following:

“On *Sunday* Morning last, the REV. Mr. WHITFIELD preach'd at our Church, on these Words, *What think ye of Christ?* There was a numerous Congregation, and 'tis thought there wou'd have been many more, if timely Notice had been given of his Preaching. His extraordinary Manner of Preaching, gains him the Admiration and Applause of most of his Hearers. He is gone to *Carolina*, on his way to *Georgia*: And 'tis said he intends to be here again next *April* or *May*.”

The same paper, January 4-11, 1739, advertises the publication (re-

paring to lay a petition before your House for abolishing the present Establishment of the Church, and Whereas it may be that we also come under the Denomination of Desenters & Desire the same thing.—We beg leave to set forth that we are not Dessenters, but a Religious Society in Communion with the Church of England,—that we do all in our power to strengthen and support the said Church—And as we Conceive that very bad Consequences would arise from the abolishment of the establishment—We therefore pray that as the Church of England ever hath been, so it may continue to be Established.

Signed in Behalf of the whole Body of the people Commonly called Methodists in Virginia, consisting of near If not altogether three thousand members.—

Geo. Shadford.

print) by William Parks, Williamsburg, of a sermon preached by George Whitfield, A. B., at the Parish Church of Boxley, in Kent, Whit Sunday, June 10, 1739, and published at the request of the Vicar and many of the hearers. Originally published in London and sold for the benefit of the school-house now erecting for the colliers in Kingwood, near Bristol.

In Slaughter's *History of Bristol Parish*, 23-26, is a sarcastic account by a contemporary of Whitfield's preachings at Blandford Church (Petersburg), in April, 1765.

The actual founder of Methodism in Virginia was Robert Williams, who came to America as one of Wesley's licensed preachers, and delivered his first sermon in Norfolk, in 1772. In the next year he went to Petersburg. At the first American Conference in Philadelphia, in July, 1773, Virginia reported one hundred members and two preachers, Richard Wright, Norfolk, and Robert Williams, Petersburg.

In 1774, the first Virginia circuit, Brunswick, reported 218 members to the Conference, and from that time the growth of the denomination was very rapid.

George Shadford, the signer of the petition, was born in England, January 19, 1739, came to America in 1773, and to Virginia in the summer of 1775. He was "the chief instrument in the great work which broke out in the latter part of 1775 in the counties south of Petersburg." This great revival added largely to the Church. At the beginning of hostilities, Mr. Shadford, with several other Methodist ministers, returned to England.

Methodists of the present day rarely realize how close their church, in its beginning was to that from which it sprang.

PETITION OF ABRAHAM COWLEY, NOV. 1, 1776.

To the Honorable, the Speaker, and Gentlemen of the House of Delegates—

The Petition of Abraham Cowley humbly sheweth—

That some-time in the Month of February last, the Prisoners of the 14th Regiment, Tories, Seamen & others, taken at Norfolk, were sent to the Town of Richmond, to be detained as prisoners of war, and quartered at the house of your Petitioner, by Turner Southall Esq'r County Lieutenant of Henrico, who instructed your Petitioner to board and furnish with provisions Fuel and other necessities, as well the said prisoners as the guard who attended them. That in consequence of such directions your Petitioner, provided the prisoners aforesaid and the guard over them with a convenient house, and furnished them with Provisions and Fire wood, hoping & expecting to be allowed a reasonable and adequate satisfaction for the same, Colo. Southall having informed your Pet'r he would be allowed one shilling p'r man per day for victualling the said Prisoners, and full compensation for wood, or other articles. That after the said Prisoners were removed from the Town of Richmond; your Pet'r attended the Comm'e of Safety with his account, for the above, but upon settling the same, the Committee disallowed ye Pet'r his charge of 32 cord of wood furnished the prisoners at 10/. p'r cord amounting to 16£ alledging the said wood was furnished to cook provisions for the prisoners, and that the allowance of 1/. p'r man p'r day was full satisfaction for Provisions&wood, Whereas y'r Pet'r humbly conceives that as the said wood was furnished for the use of the guard and prisoners wholly, and not for the purpose of cooking he is justly entitled to an allowance for the same, and therefore prays the said charge of £16 may be allowed him & he as in duty bound will pray &c.—

[Endorsement]

Ab: Cowley Rejected

MEMORIAL FROM CLERGY OF THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH.

Memorial from Clergy of the Established Church—1776—
Nov. 8. Ref'd to Com. of Religion.

To the Honorable the Speaker and Gentlemen of the House
of Delegates—

The Memorial of a considerable number of the Clergy of the established Church in Virginia..... setting forth that your Memorialists, having understood that various Petitions have been presented to the Honorable the Assembly, praying the abolition of the established Church in this State, wish to represent that when they undertook the charge of Parishes in Virginia, they depended on the publick Faith for the receiving of that Recompence for their services, during Life or good Behaviour, which the Laws of the Land promised, a Tenure which to them appears of the same sacred nature as that by which every man in the State holds, & has secured to him, his private Property; and that such of them, as are not yet provided for, entered into Holy Orders—expecting to receive the several Emoluments which such religious Establishment offered; that from the nature of their Education they are precluded from gaining a tolerable subsistence in any other way of Life: & that therefore they think it would be inconsistent with justice, either to deprive the present Incumbents of Parishes of any Rights or Profits they hold or enjoy; or to cut off from such as are now in orders & unbeneficed, those Expectations which originated from the Laws of the Land & which have been the means of disqualifying them for any other Profession or way of Life—

Also, That though your Memorialists are far from favouring Encroachments on the religious Rights of any Sect or Denomination of men, yet they conceive that a religious Establishment in a State is conducive to its Peace and Happiness. They think the opinions of mankind have a very considerable influence over their Practice; and that

it therefore cannot be improper for the legislative Body of a State to consider how such opinions as are most consonant to Reason & of the best Efficacy in human affairs, may be propagated and supported. That for their Part are of opinion that the Doctrines of Christianity have a greater Tendency to produce Virtue amongst men than any human Laws or Institutions; & that these can be best taught & preserved in their Purity in an established Church, which gives Encouragements to men to study & acquire a competent knowledge of the Scriptures: and they think that if these great Purposes can be answered by a religious Establishment, the Hardships which such a Regulation might impose on Individuals, or even Bodies of men, ought not to be considered.

Also, That whilst your Memorialists are fully persuaded of the good Effects of religious Establishment in general, they are more particularly convinced of the Excellency of the religious Establishment which has hitherto subsisted in this State:

That they ground their convictions on the Experience of 150 years, during which Period order & internal Tranquillity, true Piety & Virtue have more prevailed than in most other Parts of the world; & on the mild & tolerating spirit of the Church established, which with all christian charity & Benevolence has regarded Dissenters of every Denomination, & has shewn no Disposition to restrain them in the Exercise of their Religion: That it appears to your Memorialists that the mildness of the church Establishment has heretofore been acknowledged by those very Dissenters, who now aim at its Ruin, many of whom emigrate from other countries to settle in this, from Motives, we may reasonably suppose, of Interest & Happiness

Also, That your Memorialists apprehend many bad consequences from abolishing the church Establishment. They cannot suppose, should all Denominations of Christians be placed upon a Level, that this Equality will continue, or that no attempt will be made by any Sect for the superiority, &

they foresee that much confusion, probably civil commotions, will attend the contest . They also dread the ascendancy of that Religion which permits its Professors to threaten Destruction to the Commonwealth, in order to serve their own private Ends.

Lastly, That though the justice & Expediency of continuing the church Establishment is a matter of which your Memorialists themselves have no Doubt, yet they wish that the final Determination of your honorable House be deferred, till the general sentiments of the good People of this Commonwealth can be collected, as your Memorialists have the best Reasons to believe that a majority of them desire to see the Church Establishment continued: as the sentiments of the People have been attended to in other Instances, they submit it to your consideration, whether some Regard should not be paid in their sentiments in a matter, which so nearly concerns them, as that of Religion.

MEMORIAL OF AUGUSTA COUNTY COMMITTEE.

Augusta Memorial Nov. 9th 1776—Ref'd to Committee upon
State of the Country—

To the Honorable the President and Gentlemen of The Convention of the Colony of Virginia—

The Memorial of the Committee of the County of Augusta
Humbly sheweth

That your Memorialists taking into their consideration the unhappy and perplexed circumstances in which the cruel & unrighteous conduct of the British Ministry and Parliament Have thrown all America as well as this Colony Humbly Beg leave to observe that there is nothing under Divine favour more conducive to our preservation in our present alarming situation nor that hath a greater Tendancy for our security & future Happiness in all time to come, than a Union of the

strength & minds of all order & Degrees of men amongst us, who are good members of civil society cemented together, by one common Undisscremenating Interest, the only just Virtuous, and Lasting Bond of civil communities. And whereas there is a vast number of Dissenters from the Established church in this Colony, almost wholly so on the Frontiers whose Duty to God & themselves obliges them to support Gospel Ministers of their own profession at the same time that they & their Domestick's are charged with the maintainance & all other paroichal charges Incident to the Ministry of the Establishment This unequal Burthen is complain'd of as Inconsistent with the spirit of Taxation, that supposeth all that are made subject to such payment, Equally Interested in all the advantages resulting from such Impositions, and Equally Inconsistent with justice & with that Vertious Civil as well as religious Liberty that every Christian would wish to enjoy for Himself and that ought to be the portion of Every Good members of Society, that such partial Disscremenating Impositions besides their Injustice have a manifest Tendency to alienate & Imbiter the minds of those that are thus Imposed on creating Dissatisfaction & Disscords that Have marked the Injustice of such unequal Treatment wherever it has prevailed in characters Too legible to be passed by unnoticed Honorable Gentlemen It is as well to avoid the Injustice, as the Dangerous consequences that is the natural Result of opinions of this nature, that your Memorialists Impressed with the strongest sence of the Duty they owe to there Country in its present preservation & future Happiness and security that they Humbly Beg leave to Pray that the Honorable Convention would take this Interesting subject under their Consideration, and Grant such Emidiate & speedy relief There in as may best corospond with Christian Liberty & with Those noble & Vertious sentiments that ought, and we hope Does animate the Hearts of every Vertious American now struggling in Defence of the Common Rights of Mankind & such as may Transmitt your names, your Vertues and Fortitude, To all

aplauding Generations whilst an American Exists—Honorable
Gentlemen your Memorialists are with the greatest Respect
and Veneration

Your most Dutifull

Most obedient

Humble Servants

Tho's Lewis

Sam Mathews

Sam'l McDowell

N. Thompson

Mich'l Bowyer

Alexander Sinclair

W'm Bowyer

Ja's Tate

William McPheeters

John Gilmor

William Stephenson

Will'm Lewis

John Cyle Jun'r

James Steel

Abr'm Smith

(TO BE CONTINUED.)